

Poppy donations help veterans in community

BY SANDRA BOLAN
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Between 15,000 and 20,000 poppies are given out during the Stouffville Legion's annual poppy campaign, which results in \$40,000 to \$50,000 in donations.

That money is used to help veterans and their families, legion members and residents at-large pay for eye glasses, hearing aids, dental work or wheelchairs, for example, when they can't pay for these items themselves, according to Judy Bond, president of Royal Canadian Legion Branch 459 in Stouffville.

Poppies are available at Canadian Tire, Giant Tiger, Metro, No Frills, Walmart and The Sun-Tribune.

Poppy money recently helped pay for a veteran's stay in a specialty home after he was released from Markham Stouffville Hospital but was unable to go directly home, she said.

Larger donation requests are facilitated through the legion's Dominion Command.

The local legion's membership has stayed steady the past few years at around 350, with maybe 10 or 12 them actual veterans, according to Bond. Those vets primarily fought in the Second World War. There are two members who served in Afghanistan.

Membership is \$55 a year.

The new members, according to Bond, are not veterans or even family members of veterans, but people from the community.

Legions across Canada opened their mem-

bership to the general public about seven or eight years ago. However, that did not stop Canadian legions as a whole from losing 200,000 members last year, Bond said.

"They don't have the time anymore. They don't want to get involved," she said.

Some ladies' auxiliaries have disbanded due to the lack of membership.

In Stouffville, the ladies' auxiliary has about 30 to 35 members but they're between 70 and 90 years of age, according to Bond.

The legion's mandate is to be there for veterans, not only financially but also with a physical building. Locally, that building has also become a community gathering place.

Between member dart and euchre games, the facility plays host to baby showers, anniversary parties, funeral receptions and yoga classes three times a week.

FLOWER POWER

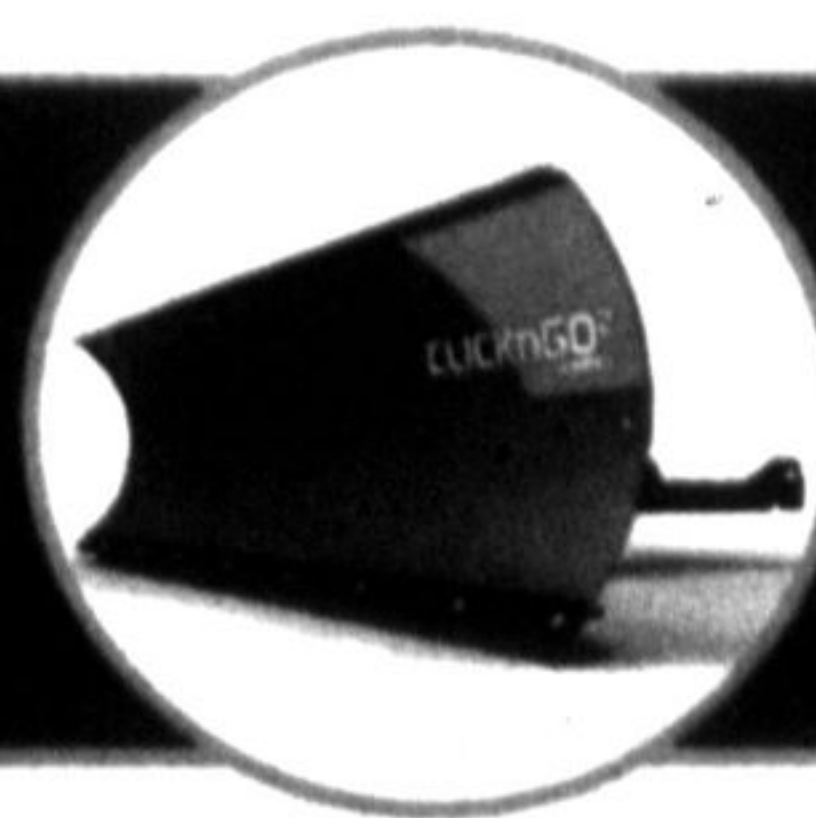
The poppy, which has become synonymous with Remembrance Day, was first associated with those killed while at war in the 19th century.

Poppies grew over the graves in the area of Belgium's Flanders Field. The land was barren before the battles, according to the Stouffville legion's website.

In 1915, following the death of a fellow soldier, Canadian Lt.-Col. John McCrae expressed his anguish in his famous 15-line poem, In Flanders Fields.

Canada officially adopted the poppy as its flower of remembrance in 1921.

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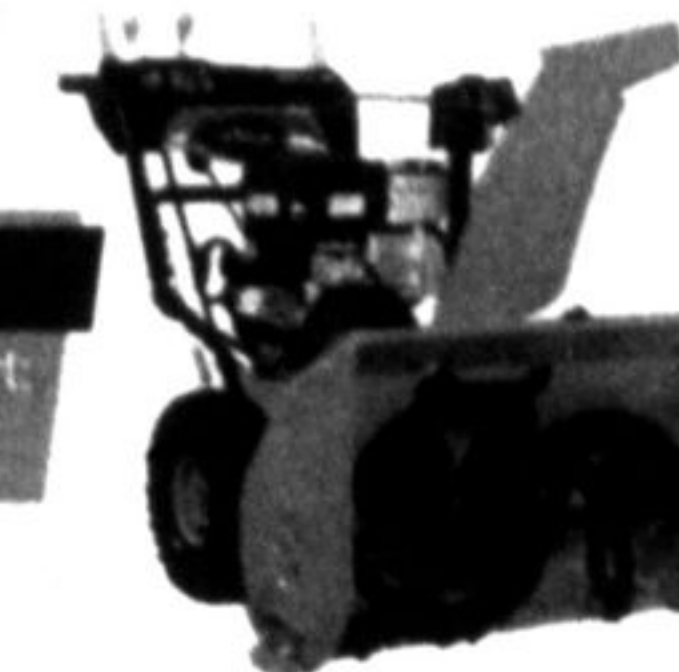
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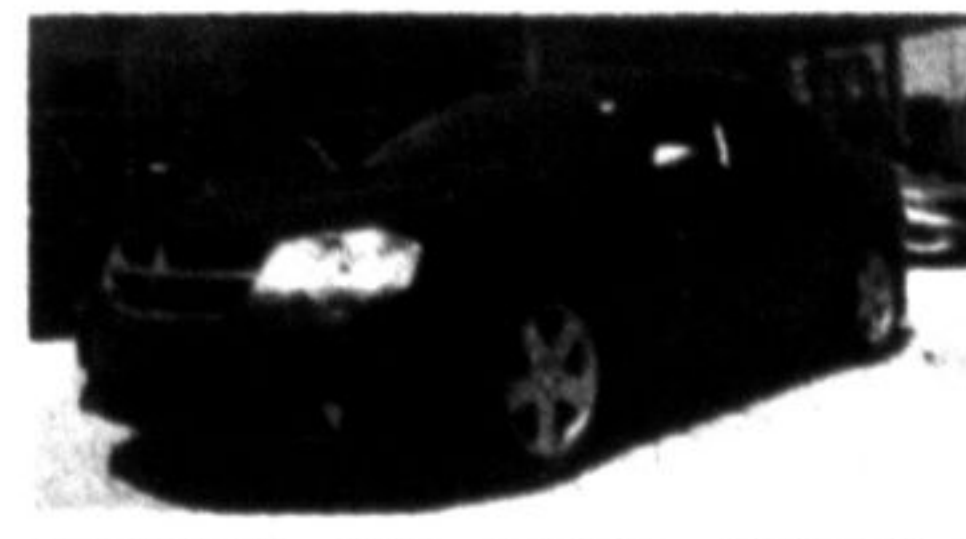
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